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Two to tangle: Modelling morphologies in contact

Most cases of language creation occur as languages split and diverge from other languages in processes which are conceptualised in linguistic phylogenies. More rarely, some languages emerge abruptly over the course of one or two generations in language communities as a result of language contact. In this talk, I report on the rapid birth of Gurindji Kriol, which shows a morpho-syntactic and lexical split between Gurindji (Pama-Nyungan) and Kriol (English-based creole). This work is the first investigation of contact-induced change within a single speaker population which uses multiple variants. I will outline an innovative modification of classic population genetics methods to investigating change over time in the Gurindji speech community. This method, which has been developed with Lindell Bromham and Xia Hua, aims to increase our ability to explain language change, with a view to making predictions about how languages will change, in particular the links between morphological simplification and language contact.